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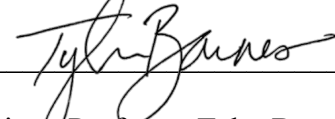
*IPSEITY VOL. 1: AN ARTFUL EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY FORMATION IN
EMERGING ADULTHOOD*

by
Lauren Alexis Taylor

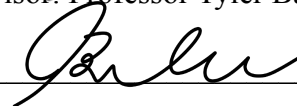
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

University, Mississippi
May 2022

Approved by



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First and foremost, I would like to thank God for giving me the opportunity and ability to create. Creating things has always been so meaningful to me and has allowed me to express myself in ways that words simply cannot. Second, I would like to thank my family for their constant support throughout my life, especially as I have pursued my degree in Graphic Design. They are my biggest source of encouragement and I cannot imagine life without them. Next, I would like to thank my advisor, Tyler Barnes, for his guidance throughout my tenure at Ole Miss. His willingness to answer my endless questions and his guidance in and out of the classroom has been extremely impactful on my academic experience as well as my journey as a freelance graphic designer. I also would like to thank Lauren Cardenas for her instruction regarding letterpress and bookbinding techniques and for her invaluable help in walking me through the process of creating a book from scratch. Finally, I would like to thank all of the Department of Art & Art History's faculty for their commitment to teaching their students and pushing them to be the best they can be. It has truly been a blessing to be a part of this community for the past four years.

ABSTRACT

Ipseity is a multi-edition coffee-table style book that integrates digital and print design and incorporates handmade elements and processes such as die-cuts, letterpress printing, gold foiling, hand-sewn bindings, and embroidery. Its design is rooted in minimalism, yet the handmade aspects, eye-catching color palette, and bold illustrations make reading *Ipseity* a visual and tactile experience. The design utilizes typography and flat-color illustrations in a consistent layout, with a strong emphasis on the handmade elements and craftsmanship throughout the book. It is not only a publication to read and ponder, but it is an artful object with a physical presence to be visually appreciated and analyzed.

Ipseity's content examines young adults' relationship with their own concepts of identity and the things that might influence who we are, such as; faith, relationships, sense of place, others' perceptions of us, our families, goals, and experiences. It is the exploration of defining selfhood in the midst of beginning adulthood. This collective experience is expressed through the eyes of many of my peers, who were gracious enough to contribute personal reflections on their own experiences with defining their identity in the form of creative writings and poetry.

At the end of the book, I have provided a way for viewers to contribute to the project and to invite conversation about personal identity among my audience. There is a QR code, a type of barcode that can be scanned with a smartphone camera, that links to a website where viewers can answer questions about what has influenced their own identity and the different ways in which they define themselves. Through the visual and tactile experience of viewing this book that

explores identity, I hope to inspire self-reflection and contemplation in each person that views my work. I want the design of this book to speak louder than the words within it so that the viewer is not only able to connect to the content, but to the project as a whole as it engages and provokes their senses. Through the book's relatable content and tangible, handmade elements, I hope to create a welcoming, interactive, and collaborative experience that encourages exploration of the things that make us who we are.

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PREFACE

ipseity

ip·se·ity | \ *ipsētē* \

: *individual identity* : *SELFHOOD*

(Merriam-Webster)

When brainstorming ideas for the content of this book, I knew I wanted the subject matter to address something meaningful and personal to me, yet relatable to the book’s audience—my peers. That being said, one of the most pressing issues that college students face is finding and defining our identity. The college and early-twenties stage of life is widely known as one of the most formative times in a young adult’s life. I have embarked on a journey of defining who I am these past few years since I have been in college, and many times, I have had conversations with my friends about figuring out who we are. So, exploring the complexities of individual identity seemed like an appropriate and captivating topic to discuss as I wrapped up my college experience at Ole Miss.

This project dives into young adults’ relationships with the concept of identity and the things that influence who we are, such as: faith, career, place, others’ perceptions of us, our families, goals, and experiences. It is the exploration of defining selfhood in the beginnings of adulthood. This experience is expressed through the eyes of many of my peers, who were gracious enough to contribute writings and personal reflections on their own experiences and journeys with defining identity.

I hope that the curious title of the book, *Iipseity*, is attention-grabbing, fits its design and content, and that it causes the reader to reflect on how one forms their ipseity—their selfhood; their individual identity. I hope that the rawness and vulnerability of the materials and personal content from the contributing writers, who have so graciously shared their personal experiences through writings and prose, inspire readers to ponder their own journeys and reflect on what has shaped them into who they are today in finding their own ipseity.

CHAPTER I.

SUBJECT MATTER

Going into my Bachelor of Fine Arts thesis, I had the intention of making a book because I wanted to further explore how I could combine print and digital design. Furthermore, I knew I wanted the content to center around an idea that was important to me. If I have the power to not only create an art piece but a piece of writing, which communicates ideas both visually and through words, I wanted to create something that was meaningful and that would provoke thought and conversation among its readers. After reflecting on what has been important and prevalent in my life and the lives of my peers throughout college, identity was the first thing that came to mind. Through formal research and countless conversations with many of my peers, I have learned that self-exploration and personality development are essential, common experiences shared among young adults. Identity is a central aspect of being a human, and my intention for *Ipseity* was to offer a space for its readers to explore and ponder how they develop and define their own sense of self.

identity

iden-ti-ty | \ ɪ-'den-t-tē, -, -'de-n- \

1 : the distinguishing character or personality of an individual: INDIVIDUALITY

2 : who someone is : the name of a person

3 : the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person different from others

(Merriam Webster)

Identity is what makes a person who they are; what makes them unique; what makes them themselves. It is arguably the most important and influential component of a person's life. What we do, how we treat others, and how we generally live our lives are all dependent upon how we define ourselves.

The American Psychological Association defines identity as the following:

an individual's sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles. Identity involves a sense of continuity, or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year (despite physical or other changes). Such a sense is derived from one's body sensations; one's body image; and the feeling that one's memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self (VandenBos, 2007).

Adolescence and early adulthood are the most formative years in an individual's journey to characterize their identity. Erik H. Erikson, a world-renowned developmental psychologist who coined the term "identity crisis," calls one's journey to define their identity as "the principal crisis of adolescence" (Helve, 2019, p. 4). In college, individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood and are mostly independent for the first time in their lives. They are no longer under their parents' constant supervision, have the freedom to make their own decisions, and live their own life with less parental restriction or judgment. They no longer have to conform to an identity that has often been created for them within their family environment, but have the freedom to figure out and define their own selfhood.

Late adolescence and early adulthood is the defining period of time for the formation of an individual's identity, and once their identity has developed, it remains fairly consistent for the remainder of the person's life. Developmental psychologists, Laura Ferrer-Wreder and Jane Kroger (2020), verify that "certainly, identity-defining choices and life directions can change over time, but beyond emerging adulthood, major identity changes become far less common"

(pp. 8-9). However, small adjustments and adaptations of one's identity to certain life phases or contexts can surely occur. The main sense of identity is maintained, yet it is common (and healthy, for that matter) for small shifts in certain aspects of one's identity to occur based on environmental, personal, or physical changes. In his book *The Ethics of Identity*, Anthony Appiah (2010) states that "the sense of self (comprising the sense of being and the sense of "I") is not, therefore, some edifice that is constructed and remains constant. Instead, it is a continually shifting phenomenon that acts like a vehicle in and through which we negotiate the world" (p. 30).

So, how is this sense of self or personal identity defined in emerging adulthood? What constitutes the establishment of one's identity? Developmental psychologists point out various different factors associated with one's environment and life experience that can influence their identity formation. Although environment and context are important to the development of personal identity, the more pertinent influence is not only how the individual relates to their environment, but also how they relate their environment to themselves. According to Ferrer-Wreder and Kroger (2020), "[Erikson] saw identity development also as a reciprocal relationship between individual and context, a process of recognizing and being recognized by others... its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going' and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (p. 22). The recognition of others is also essential to one's formation of identity. Whether these recognitions are positive or negative, they are taken to heart and influence identity formation, especially when given by those who are parental or significant figures in a person's life. As endorsed by many highly regarded developmental psychologists, identity is greatly influenced by environment and recognition.

Yet, there are many subcategories of environmental and interpersonal factors that must be addressed when discussing the journey of defining selfhood in the college years. These are factors such as family, place, faith, race, occupation, experiences, and hobbies. Identity formation is a universal experience for adolescents transitioning into young adulthood. That being said, each individual has a unique experience of how they come to form their identity based on their circumstances and environment. Therefore, I did not want the content of this book, which was centered on such an individual yet common experience, to solely be written by me, only coming from my perspective. Because each person has their own perspective on identity formation in their own lives, I wanted to provide many different perspectives within the book. So, *Ipsenity* features writings from many of my peers who shared how these different factors affect their own sense of identity as they have navigated through emerging adulthood, in order to provide multiple diverse perspectives. The contributors offer vulnerable insight into their personal struggles as well as triumphs, and I hope their openness encourages readers to be authentic with themselves as they ponder how these factors may influence their own identity as well. Not only did I gather the content of the book from contributors for the sake of showcasing a variety of perspectives on identity, but also because I wanted this project to be collaborative, both in the creation of the book as well as the experience of the book. This is why I included a way for readers to contribute their own stories of personal identity formation in the book itself.

CHAPTER II.

PROCESS

While pursuing my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, I was exposed to many different mediums of art, and I uncovered a passion for print design and other physical processes of making art. I found myself especially drawn to working in mediums that allow me to integrate hands-on processes, such as printmaking, letterpress, and bookbinding, with my digital design skills. I appreciate the physical aspect of print design combined with the freedom of digital design; when working digitally, elements can be easily and quickly added or deleted with little to no consequences, while changes to a print design require the product to be reprinted. I wanted to focus on the synergy of these two design approaches in my thesis. Additionally, the inclusion of historical processes, typefaces, and other elements of traditional graphic design was essential to the production of this project. It was also important to me for *Iipseity* to be a fully immersive, tactile experience for both the creator and the reader. As the designer, I wanted the process of creating the book to be process-focused and require a high degree of craftsmanship. For the reader, reading *Iipseity* should be an immersive experience, allowing for visual and physical exploration as one observes the contents within the book. In order to accomplish this tactile experience, I incorporated handmade processes, such as letterpress, bookbinding, embroidery, gold-foiling, and die-cuts into the design and production of the book. The ability to create digitally with minimal constraints combined with the problem-solving skills and limitations involved with creating a multiple-edition printed book is difficult and I wanted to challenge myself to learn new techniques and expand my abilities when creating *Iipseity*.



Figure 1. Ipsesity style guide.

Within the first stage of the creative process, I had to establish a consistent style for the entirety of *Ipsesity* to be designed in. This consisted of creating a logo, choosing typefaces, determining a color palette, and forming a specific illustration style to use throughout the book (Figure 1). I was confident that I wanted the design of the book to be rooted in minimalism because of the many different visual and tactile elements I intended on incorporating into the book. I did not want the layout and typographical design to distract from or compete with the physical and visual elements that I would add to the pages after they were digitally printed. Additionally, there were limitations I had to face within the digital design which required the design to be rooted in minimalism, such as the limited variety and size of typefaces available in

the Art department to use for letterpress printing. While the digital elements of design included in the book are minimalistic, the overall design is visually captivating through the use of clean layouts, vibrant colors, bold illustrations, and striking typography.

As far as the color palette, I have always been drawn to vibrant, saturated colors, and I knew that I wanted the illustrations throughout the book to stand out because of their bold hues. I took inspiration from jewel-toned colors, such as ruby, emerald, and sapphire, but altered the vibrancy and values of the colors so that they became more playful than the rich, deep hue of traditional jewel tones. These colors were chosen to parallel the balance of depth and relatability in the content of the book: they have roots in the class and formality of jewel tones, yet are friendly and eye-catching because of their vibrance. Regarding the illustration style, I wanted to stay faithful to my personal style while also making it unique to this project specifically. The style I usually illustrate in is characterized by geometric, flat-color shapes and subtle color shifts to indicate changes in value. Because the overall design of *Iipseity* is rooted in minimalism, I decided to establish an illustration style that consists of geometric abstraction, flat-color shapes, and consistent outlines. Many of the illustrations feature patterns and repeating elements found throughout, such as stars, the moon, clouds, and vines. Each illustration is a landscape and takes cues from the poem it accompanies in the book: for example, the illustration for “The Lie I’ve Lived” references the “quarks to the galaxies” that Ming Zern Ngho references in his poem (Figure 2). Once the general design elements were determined, I designed a digital version of the entire book using Adobe Illustrator and InDesign. Adobe Illustrator, the program I used to digitally create the illustrations and the *Iipseity* logo, is the digital software that is the industry standard for graphic design. Adobe InDesign is another industry-standard program that I used to create the entire layout of *Iipseity*.



Figure 2. Illustration for the poem “The Lie I’ve Lived” by Ming Zern Ngoh in *Ipseity*

After brainstorming and sketching, I decided to create the logo for *Ipseity* using Allenoire, the typeface which is also used for most of the headers, titles, and pull-quotes in the text. Allenoire is a friendly, rounded-out serif typeface with beautiful ligatures and alternates that reflects the balance of approachability and class that the content of the book embodies. It is approachable because of its humanistic and organic qualities, yet formal and classy with its

stylistic alternates and flourishes. It is used exclusively in lowercase throughout the book and in the logo for a softer, friendlier appearance: the capitals seemed too formal for the rest of the book's aesthetic. Additionally, using all lowercase letters allowed for the title text to have a more uniform height without the tops of the capitals extending above the height of the rest of the lowercase letters. The *Iipseity* logo uses different-sized letters in a stacked, nontraditional layout that arranges the letters so that they are not all sitting on a common baseline. This helps to create an interesting, fun, curiosity-evoking logo that aims to draw in the viewer to take a look inside the book to figure out what "ipseity" is. Mr Eaves Mod is another typeface used for the titles which are die-cut in the physical book. It is a sans-serif font, meaning it does not have the small, projecting lines at the end of the strokes of each letter. Mr Eaves Mod is a spinoff of the classic serif typeface, Mrs Eaves, and offers geometric-shaped letters that pair perfectly with the geometric nature of *Iipseity*'s illustration style and binding.

The main text, or body copy, of the book is set in Adobe Garamond Pro, a digital adaptation of the original metal typeface called Garamond. This typeface is categorized as a serif font, meaning that it has small lines that protrude from the end of each stroke of each letter. Garamond, an old-style serif typeface with a classic and refined aesthetic, was created by Claude Garamond in the early 15th century (*Britannica*, 2022). All modern variations of the typeface are based off of the original metal type that Claude Garamond carved himself. As a result, different type foundries have created their own versions of Garamond's original font, based off of the original metal type or later adaptations of the original type. Aesthetically, Garamond is classified as an Old-style typeface, meaning it mimics the organic quality of handwriting in a more refined and precise manner. Additionally, Old-style typefaces are modeled after the capital letters used in Roman inscriptions (Bringhurst, 2004, p. 124). Garamond is considered an exemplary Old-style

typeface and is one of the most popular and continually used fonts. The *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* describes Garamond as “open and clearly cut, characterized by a narrow ‘a’ with a low bowl, an ‘e’ with a very small loop and a subtle down-tilt to the cross-stroke, and top serifs to such letters as i, m, n, p, and r that are slightly scooped out” (Kent et al., 1968). These small technical details in combination with the clarity, readability, and elegance of Garamond made it the perfect stylistic choice for the main text within *Ipseity*. Because Garamond is a serif font, it eases the flow of reading: the serifs make each character more distinctive, allowing the eye to recognize each letter more quickly, consequently making the words easy to read. It complements the other typefaces used throughout *Ipseity* as it acts as a balance between the softness of Allenoire and the structure of Mr Eaves Mod. The thought-provoking, reflective content in the book is reinforced by the elegance and sophistication of the Garamond typeface, while the visual precision and clarity of the letters support the high degree of craftsmanship of the book itself. Moreover, the history of Garamond as a physical metal typeface and its roots in letterpress printing connect to the historical elements of graphic design that I intended to incorporate throughout the production of the book. The main reason I chose to use Garamond, however, was because it was one of the physical metal fonts available in the Art Department’s metal type library in the letterpress studio. By establishing Garamond as the typeface for body copy throughout the entire book, there would be a seamless visual transition between the body copy that was digitally printed and the body copy that was letterpress printed.

Concerning *Ipseity*’s physical production, letterpress printing is one of the processes that I incorporated in order to add a handmade, tactile quality to some of the text in the book. Letterpress is the process of printing text using metal type that is set by hand, letter-by-letter,

then loaded into a machine that inks the type and creates a print when paper is loaded onto a large cylinder, called the impression cylinder, and rolled over the inked metal type. When printing using a letterpress, the pressure on the paper from passing between the rollers and the type creates a slight indentation on the letters, having a similar tactile effect as a debossment. This tactile quality of the indentation of the text into the paper due to letterpress printing was important to the tactile experience of the book's production, but is not the only reason I incorporated letterpress into my project. For one, it is an extremely hands-on, process-driven method of printing that requires more critical thinking, problem-solving, and hand-making than digital printing. The trial and error, frustrations, and amount of time that letterpress printing requires are far outweighed by the rewarding experience of making something by hand and the quality of the resulting prints.

Letterpress printing is an essential component of the history of graphic design that arose with the development of printmaking technologies such as woodblock relief printing and movable type. After all, letterpress is the original form of mass-produced graphic design, long before the Adobe software made digital design possible. Originating in the 15th century, Johann Gutenberg's invention of the printing press made letterpress the most prolific and efficient printing process available until the onset of lithographic printing in the 19th century (*Britannica*, 2013). Today, letterpress printing has become much more of an art form than a mere means of production. Many artists, including myself, find fulfillment in the process of creating in a more analog technique. After all, letterpress printing requires hand-setting type, mixing ink, registering the text to the correct spot on the paper, and physically operating the press in order to get a print (Figure 3). Yet, the tactile and visual qualities of letterpress printing add to the sense of high-quality craftsmanship that I was after when creating this book.



Figure 3. Letterpress printing a page in *Ipseity*.

Originally, I had intended to hand-set the type for most of the poetry in *Ipseity*. I was unable to hand-set the text of the poetry featured in *Ipseity* due to limitations in the amount of metal type available in the Art Department's type library: I physically did not have enough letters available to hand-set each poem. Instead, I ordered photo-polymer plates from Boxcar Press, a letterpress studio located in Minneapolis, Minnesota that is the leading provider of custom photopolymer plates used in letterpress, to use instead of metal type. However, I still utilized Garamond as the body-copy typeface because of its significance to graphic design history as well as to the design of *Ipseity*.

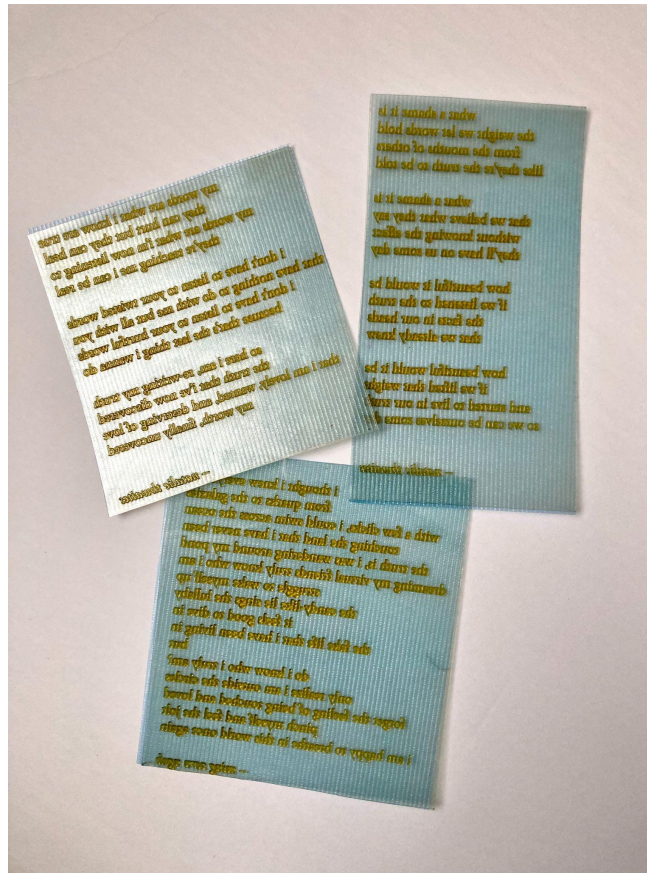


Figure 4. Photopolymer plates used for letterpress printing in the production of *Ipseity*.

Although I was unable to hand-set Garamond in its metal-type form in *Ipseity*, I was still able to incorporate Garamond by using photopolymer plates instead. Letterpress printing with photopolymer plates allows for a more customizable way to print than traditional metal type while still using the letterpress. Patterns, illustrations, or type can be designed digitally in Adobe Illustrator, then sent out to be produced as photopolymer plates, which can then be used in the letterpress in lieu of metal or wood type. Photopolymer plates are sheets of polymer with a light-sensitive coating on one side that is then exposed to light and hardened (Figure 4). The plate is then washed in water, and the areas that hardened during exposure remain while the

unexposed areas wash away. This leaves the design raised on the plate, ready to be mounted on a steel base and printed on the letterpress. Despite originally planning to utilize hand-set metal type in the production of *Iipseity*, using photopolymer plates in the letterpress further engaged my goal of fully integrating digital and analog processes into my thesis body of work.

Bookbinding is another historical process used in the production of *Iipseity* for its tactile, visual, and functional qualities. *Iipseity* is bound in the Japanese stab binding technique in the hemp leaf pattern; furthermore, the book was assembled using the Japanese fukuro-toji method (Figure 5). Originating in the Edo period in the 17-19th centuries, the Japanese stab binding and fukuro-toji methods were used to bind books composed of woodblock prints and text (Forrer, 2003). Contrary to other bookbinding techniques, which are sewn through the spine of the book, Japanese stab bindings are sewn through the front and back covers, requiring a large margin on one side of the pages. This is where the fukuro-toji binding method is useful: a spread is printed on one side of the paper, then folded with the printed side facing out to create two pages. The open ends of the folded spreads are then sewn together so that the folded creases of each spread make up the fore-edge of the book (Forrer, 2003).



Figure 5. Japanese stab binding technique in the hemp leaf pattern on *Ipseity*. Image Credit: Frank Estrada.

The hemp leaf pattern of the Japanese stab binding makes for a more secure binding of pages while also adding visual interest to the front and back covers of the book. It creates a striking geometric pattern, making the binding both visual and functional, which is why I wanted to use the hemp leaf pattern over the traditional four-hole Japanese stab binding pattern. The geometric style of the hemp leaf pattern also matches the geometric style seen within the illustrations throughout the project. I also incorporated the geometric pattern that the hemp-leaf binding creates into the design on the interior of the book by embroidering the pattern on multiple pages throughout. The books are bound using the fukuro-toji method because it did not require the pages to be double-sided. This, in turn, allowed me to add multiple different embellishments, such as die-cuts, embroidery, removable illustrations, and debossment to

singular pages without interfering with the design on the adjacent pages. Having the pages assembled this way also allowed for more controlled structure and volume to the book, contributing more to its presence as a physical object and making it more similar in size and volume to a coffee table style book.

The other handmade processes that I incorporated into the design and production of *Iipseity*, such as die-cuts, debossment, and gold foiling, were completed using a Cricut Explore 3 machine. The Cricut Explore 3 is a desktop crafting machine that utilizes digital software to precisely automate crafting processes, such as die-cutting, gold foiling, debossing, scoring, and even drawing. Users of the Cricut Explore 3 can utilize their digital software to create designs within the Cricut Design interface or can upload their own designs from other programs such as Adobe Illustrator, which is how I completed all of the handmade processes within *Iipseity*. After completing all digital printing and letterpress printing, I used the fine-tip blade in the Cricut to complete all diecuts throughout the book. I then used the Cricut fine debossing tip to add the debossed elements. Finally, I used the foil transfer kit to execute the gold-foiled accents found on the pages within *Iipseity*. Using the Cricut allowed these processes to be accomplished much more efficiently and precisely than if I would have executed them exclusively by hand.

CHAPTER III.

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Although I am influenced constantly and in many different ways by countless historical and current artists, there are four specific influences that helped shape the design and production of *Ipseity*. The first artist, Joshua Noom, is a currently-practicing freelance graphic designer from near my hometown in Southwest Florida. I discovered his work on social media several years ago, and was pleasantly surprised to find out that he often designs graphics for my church in Naples, Florida. What inspires me about Noom's work is his bold illustration style coupled with his captivating color palettes (Figures 6-8). The way that Noom handles illustration specifically inspired me in the development of my unique illustration style for *Ipseity*. The shapes throughout his illustrations are always outlined, and I appreciate the geometric, mosaic quality this element gives to his designs, which appear similar to stained glass windows. His abstraction of nature and the way he incorporates pattern into his work influenced my use of these techniques in the illustrations for *Ipseity*.



Figure 6. Joshua Noom, *Intimacy with God* (2021). Digital illustration.



Figure 7. Joshua Noom, *The Advent of Christ* (2021). Digital illustration.



Figure 8. *Easter 2021* (2021). Digital illustration.

The second artist who was highly inspirational to me throughout the process of creating the book is Lauren Hom, a graphic designer who currently lives and works in Detroit, Michigan. I also came across her work on social media and was instantly captivated by her quirky typography and whimsical color palettes (Figure 9). Not only this, but I appreciate how she creates work that pushes the boundaries of the manifestation of design in the tangible world. For example, she designs digitally, then takes these designs and creates them in the physical world, like painting a mural or creating a typographical illustration out of foods like cookies, soup, or flour (Figure 10). These kinds of physical projects that bring digital design into the physical realm were most notable and inspiring to me when working on this project specifically. Hom also creates work that incorporates many of her talents, such as painting, writing, photography and crafting, which inspired me to do the same in the process of creating *Ipseity*. I appreciate the way she brings her designs off the screen and into real life as she combines all of her passions to create vibrant, fun, and impactful designs.



Figure 9. Lauren Hom, *Googleplex Mural* (2018).



Figure 10. Lauren Hom, *Flour Power* (2021).

Another artist who influenced my approach to color and abstraction throughout *Ipseity* is Frank Stella, an American painter whose work falls into the category of abstract expressionism. Paintings that are considered abstract expressionist are characterized by nonobjective forms on large canvases with an exploratory use of color and an emphasis on personal expression. Yet, Stella's work pushes the boundaries of what abstract expressionism can be, challenging the norm and paving its own way into a new form of abstraction (*Britannica, 2021*). Stella's work is decidedly minimalist, yet extremely visually interesting and impactful. Personally, his most noteworthy works are those that are part of the *Protractor* series, such as *Harran II* (Figure 11). This painting, specifically its geometric shapes, clean lines, and psychedelic colors, helped inspire me in the process of creating the illustrations included throughout *Ipseity*.



Figure 11. Frank Stella, *Harran II* (1967). Polymer and fluorescent polymer paint on canvas.

Finally, the historic Japanese Ukiyo-e paintings of the Edo period that were often included in books assembled using the Japanese stab binding and fukuro-toji methods of bookbinding were highly influential to the design and production of *Iipseity*. Ukiyo-e illustrations were often abstract depictions of the Japanese natural landscape and flora and fauna (Figure 12). They are characterized by a flat-color illustration style; flat shapes of color were then outlined with thick black ink to help create definition and add detail to certain parts of the print. In order to reference these prints in *Iipseity*, I incorporated the flat color and strong outlines into the illustration style used throughout the book.



Figure 12. Katsushika Hokusai, *Inume Pass, Kai Province (Koshu inumetoge)* (ca. 1829-1833). Polychrome woodblock print.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, *Ipseity Vol. 1* is an artful exploration of identity formation in emerging adulthood. By showcasing diverse content on the deeply personal, yet widely relatable topic of identity formation in young adulthood, *Ipseity* aims to start a conversation within its viewing audience about how we become who we are and which factors influence our identities. Most importantly, the book is a visual and tactile experience that is rooted in impactful design and process-driven production. Handmade elements such as letterpress printing, hand-bookbinding, die-cuts, gold foiling, embroidery, and debossment emphasize the book's craftsmanship and enhance its visual and tactile properties. *Ipseity's* design is influenced by traditional Japanese bookbinding and Ukiyo-e prints, abstract expressionist paintings, and modern-day graphic illustrations. Overall, *Ipseity* aims to highlight traditional and handmade elements of graphic design while starting a conversation about identity and the things that make us who we are.

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EXHIBITION IMAGES

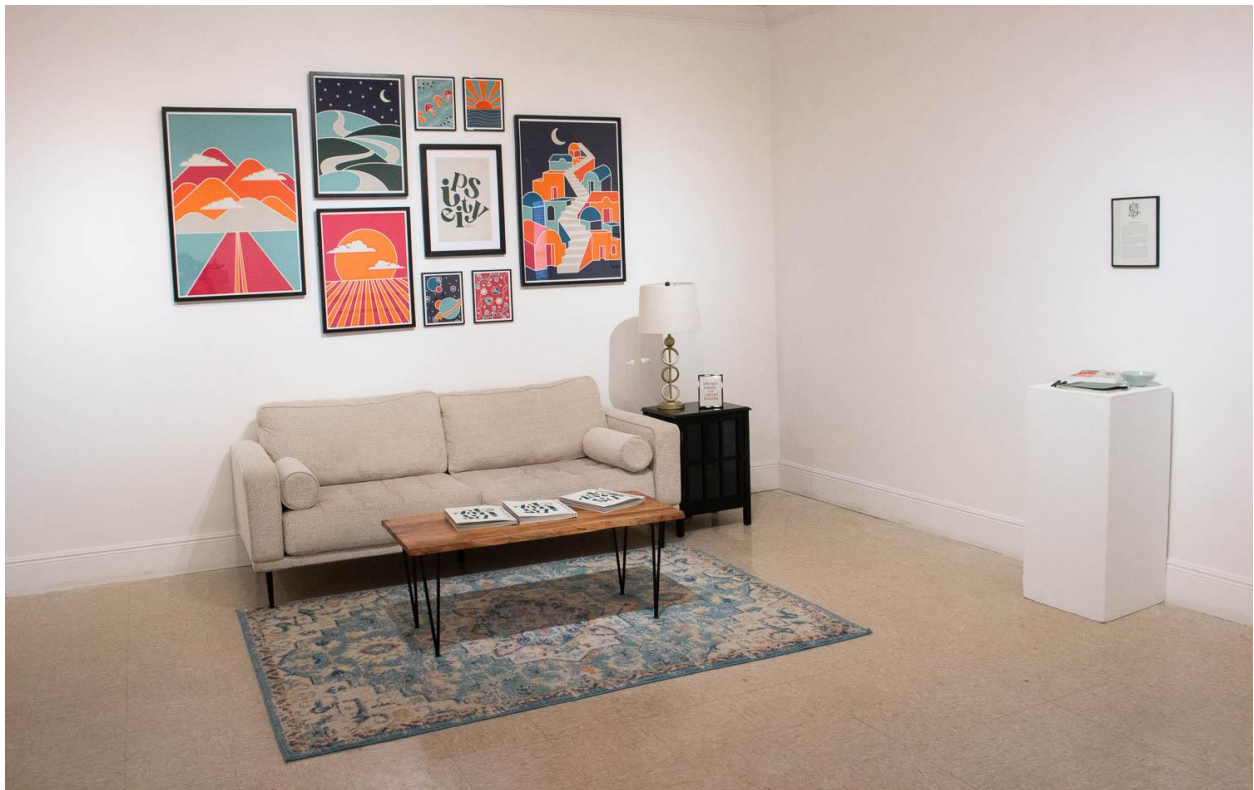


Lauren Taylor's Bachelor of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition in Meek Hall Gallery 130.

March 21-25, 2022.



Ipseity Postcards.
Digital prints, 5" x 7," 2022.



Ipseity Vol. 1 Installation.
Handmade books & framed illustrations, 2022.



*A closer look at the Ipseity installation.
Handmade books & framed illustrations, 2022.
Image Credit: Frank Estrada*



Ipseity Vol. 1 Illustrations.

Digital prints: 24”x 36,” 18”x 24,” 12”x18,” 8.5”x 11,” 2022.

Image Credit: Frank Estrada



Ipseity Vol. 1 Show Cards & Guest Book.

Digitally printed postcards by Moo Inc. & handmade guest book with gold foiling and a Japanese stab binding in a hemp leaf pattern, 2022.



Ipseity Vol. 1 Covers- 3 Editions.

Die-cut digital print with gold foiling; hand-sewn Japanese stab binding in a hemp leaf pattern, 2022.



Ipsity Vol. 1 Cover Detail.

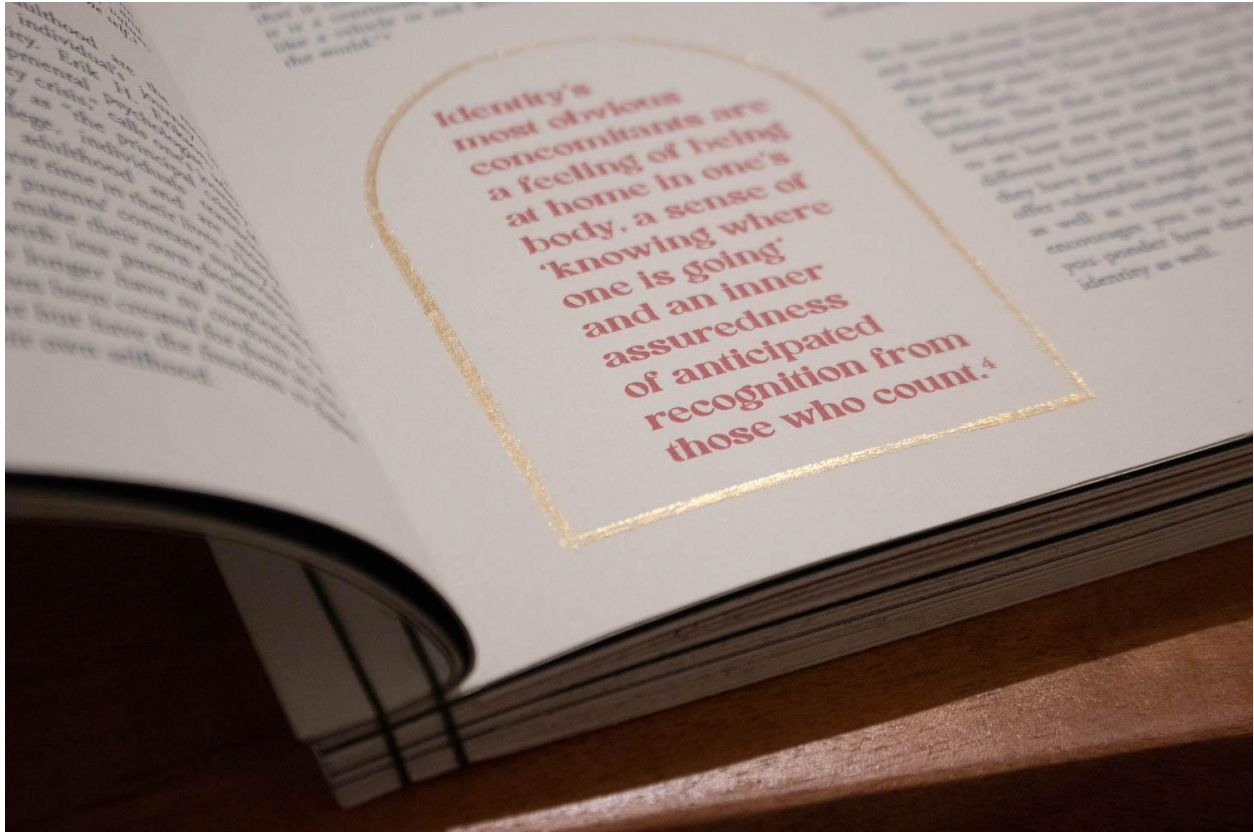
Die-cut digital print with gold foiling; hand-sewn Japanese stab binding in a hemp leaf pattern, 2022.



Ipseity Vol. 1 Title Page.

Die-cut cardstock with gold foiling, 2022.

Image Credit: Frank Estrada



"Identity: A Psychological Perspective" Detail (Ipseity Vol. 1, page 4).

Digital print with gold foiling, 2022.

Image Credit: Frank Estrada



"Lose Yourself" Detail (Ipseity Vol. 1 page 5).

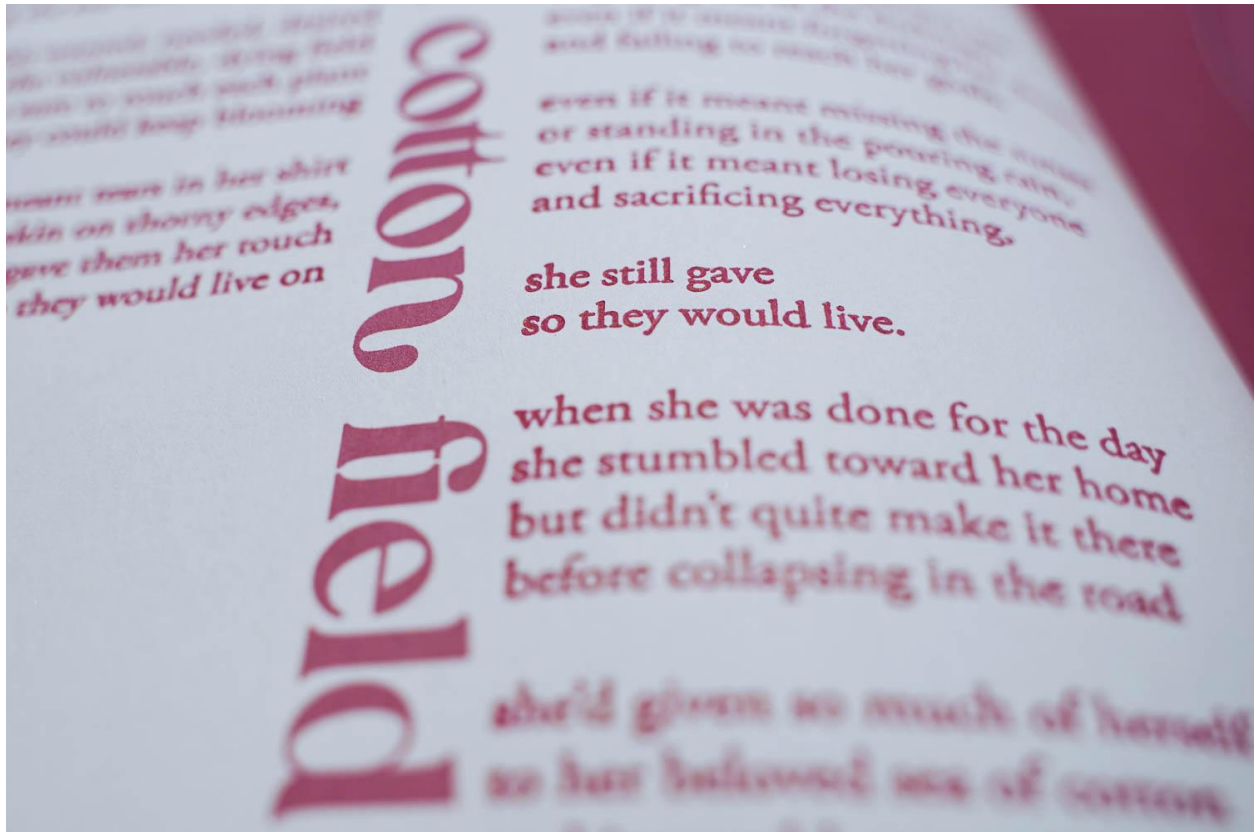
Digital print with gold foiling, 2022.

Image Credit: Frank Estrada



Uncovered Detail (Ipseity Vol. 1, page 6).

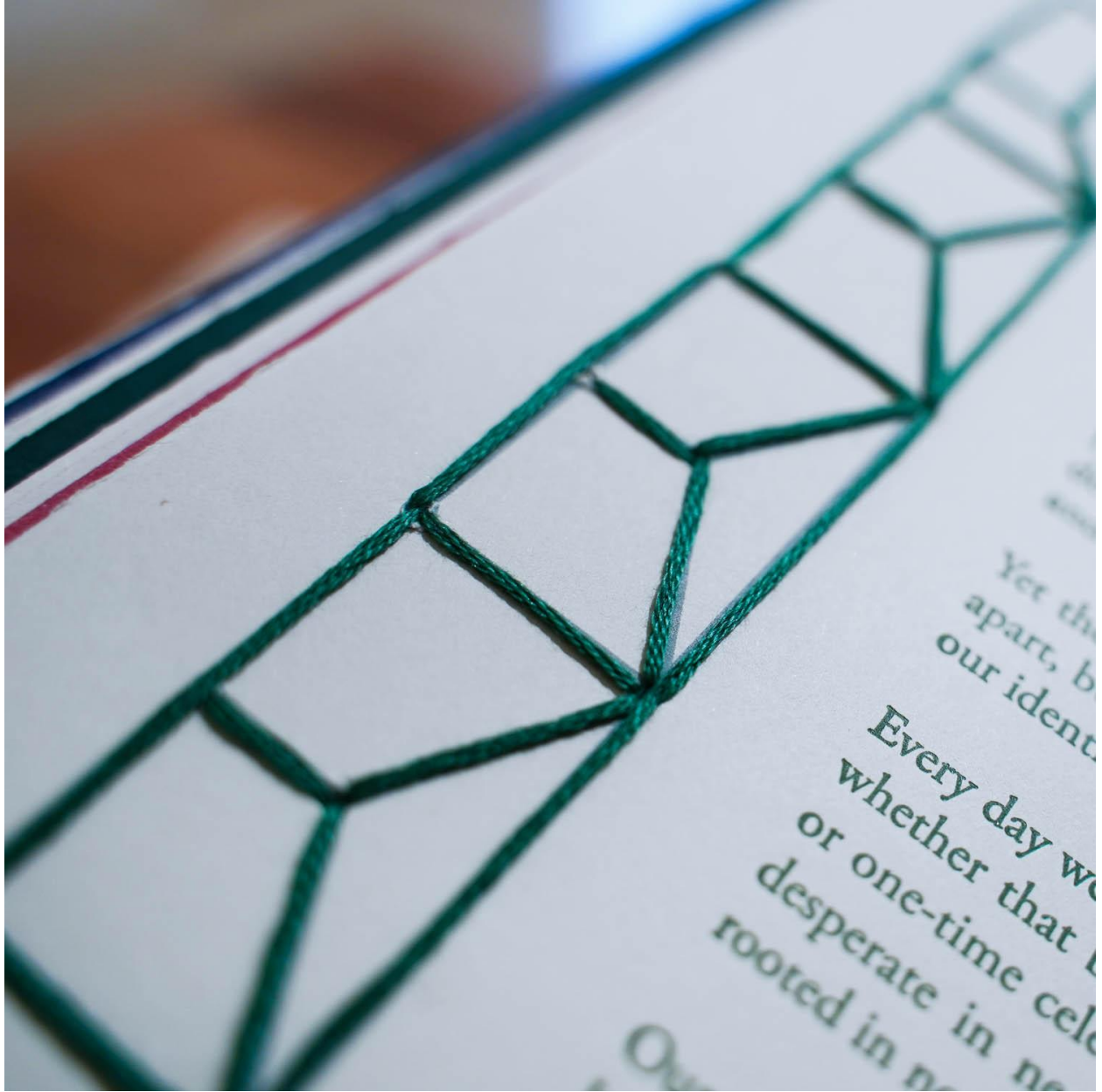
Die-cut cardstock, 2022.



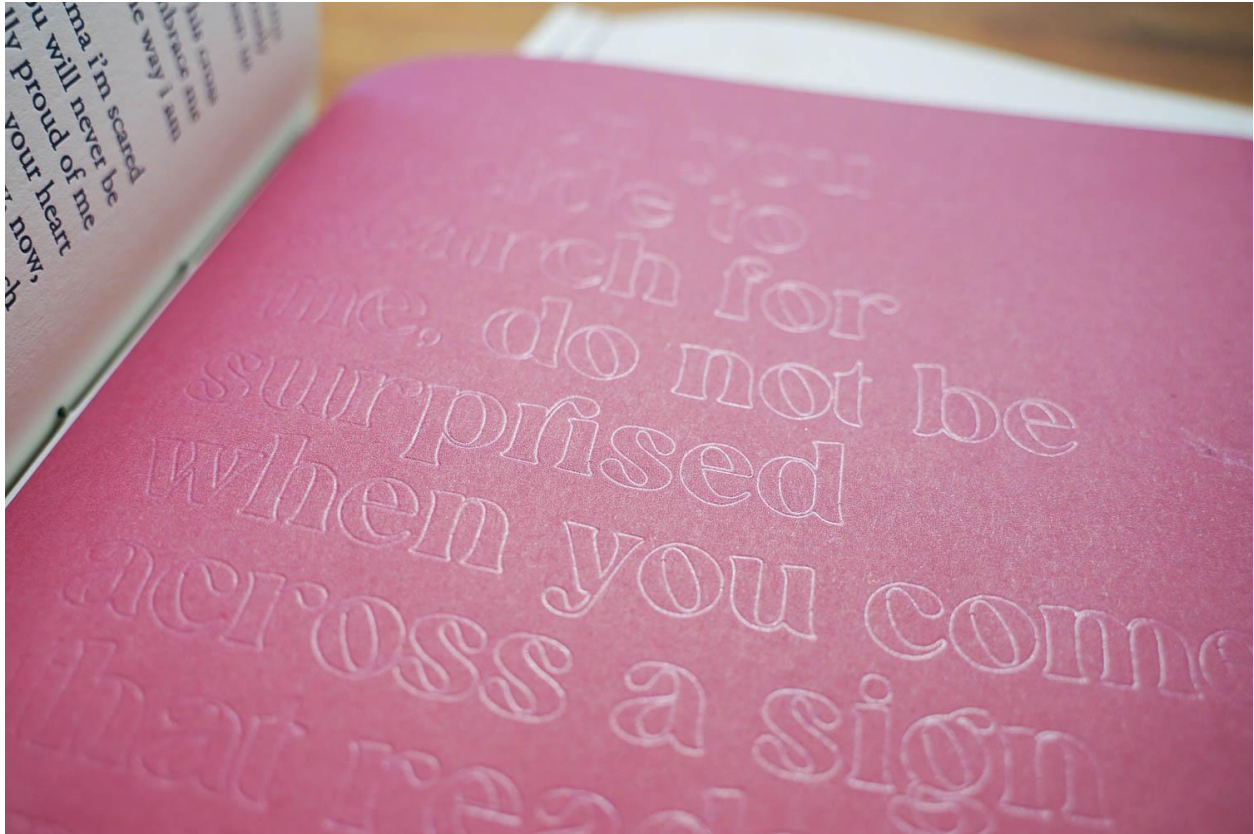
"The Red Cotton Field" Detail (Ipseity Vol. 1 page 11).

Digital & letterpress print, 2022.

Image Credit: Frank Estrada



"Humanity" Detail (Ipseity Vol. 1 page 15).
Digital print with hand-sewn embroidery, 2022.
Image Credit: Frank Estrada



"Lost in the Universe" Detail (Ipseity Vol. 1 page 32).

Digital print with debossment, 2022.

Image Credit: Frank Estrada



“Meet the Contributors” Detail (Ipseity Vol. 1 page 41).

Digital print with gold foiling, 2022.

Image Credit: Frank Estrada



“The Journey” Spread (Ipseity Vol. 1, pages 23-24).

Die-cut digital and letterpress prints, 2022.



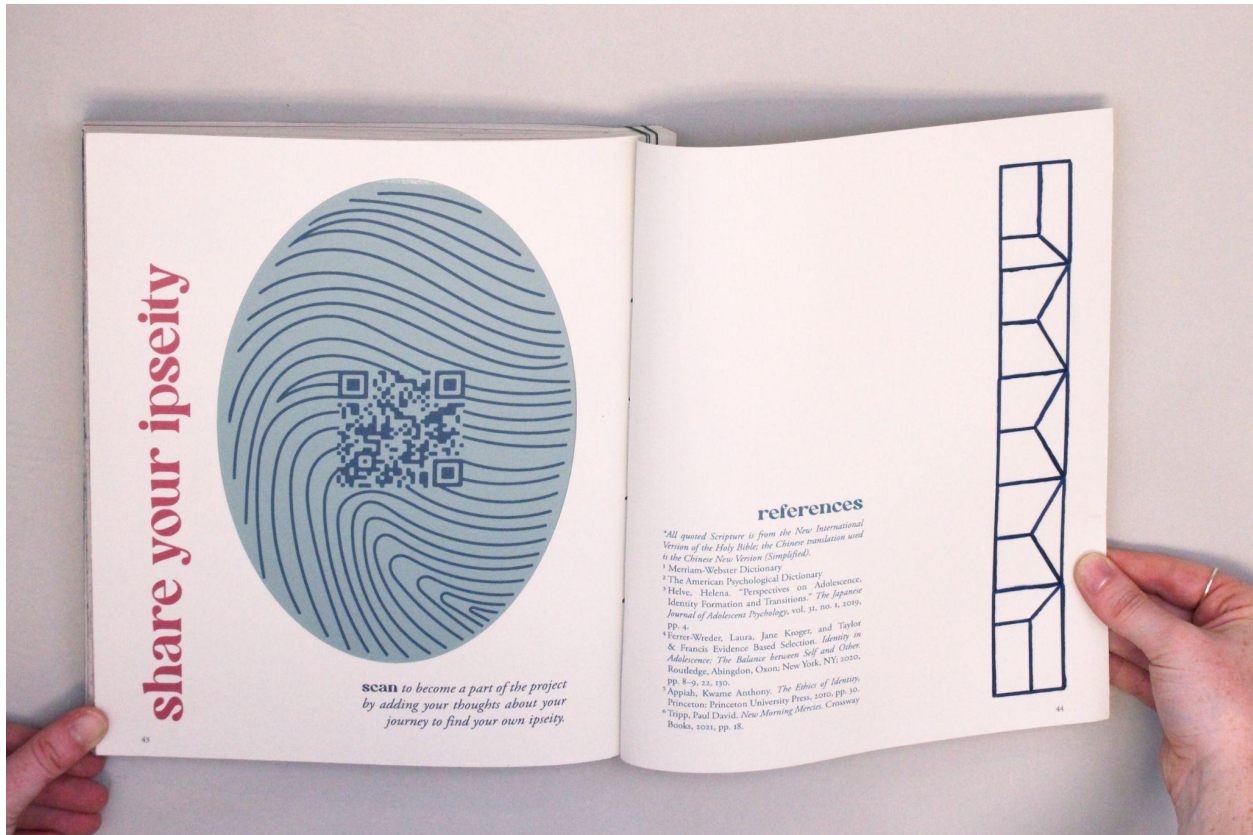
“Humanity” & “Present Living” Spread (*Ipseity* Vol. 1 pages 15-16).

Digital and letterpress prints with gold foiling and hand-sewn embroidery, 2022.



In His Image Spread 1 (Ipseity Vol. 1, pages 35-36).

Digital print with gold foiling, 2022.



“Share Your Ipseity” & References Spread (Ipseity Vol. 1, pages 43-44).

Die-cut digital prints with hand-sewn embroidery, 2022.



Graphic Designer Lauren Taylor with Her Ipseity Vol. 1 Installation & Book in Meek Hall Gallery 130, 2022.

DIGITAL VERSION OF *IPSEITY VOL. 1*

Please also visit the following link to view a video of the complete contents of the physical book:

<https://youtu.be/A-6-d2zv1zg>



**Woods
city**

VOL. 1

created by lauren taylor

bfa thesis • spring 2022

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bella johnson • *mirror, mirror on the wall*

production notes

paper • *mohawk fine papers* | *mohawk carnival + via* | *80c vellum* | *light gray, navy, new forest green*

typefaces • *display: allenoire* | *serif: garamond* | *sans serif: mr. eaves mod*

letterpress type | printed with photopolymer plates • *pages*

custom die-cuts • *pages*

exposed hemp leaf stab binding with 2-ply

gold foiling using the cricut explore 2 machine

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for giving me the opportunity and ability to create. Creating things has always been so meaningful to me and has allowed me to express myself in ways that words simply cannot. Second, I would like to thank my family for their constant support throughout my life, especially as I have pursued my degree in Graphic Design. They are my biggest source of encouragement and I cannot imagine life without them. Next, I would like to thank my advisor, Tyler Barnes, for his guidance throughout my tenure at Ole Miss. His willingness to answer my endless questions and his guidance in and out of the classroom have been extremely impactful on my academic experience as well as my journey as a freelance graphic designer. I also would like to thank Lauren Cardenas for her instruction regarding letterpress and bookbinding techniques and for her invaluable help in walking me through the process of creating a book from scratch. Finally, I would like to thank all of the Department of Art & Art History's faculty for their commitment to teaching their students and pushing them to be the best they can be. It has truly been a blessing to be a part of this community for the past four years.

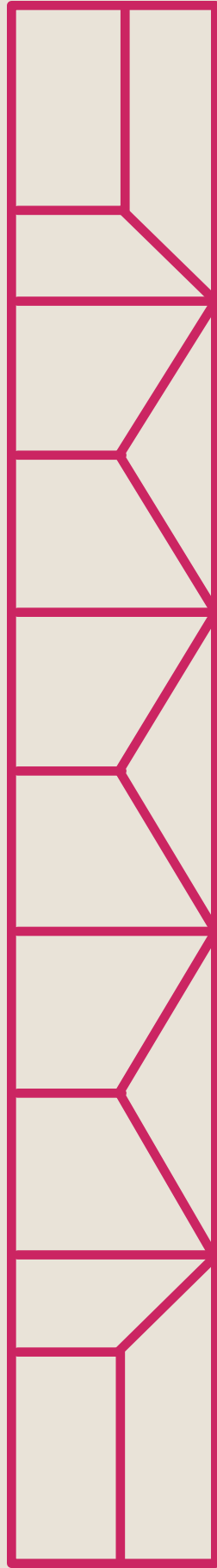
special thanks

brooke white

margaret perez

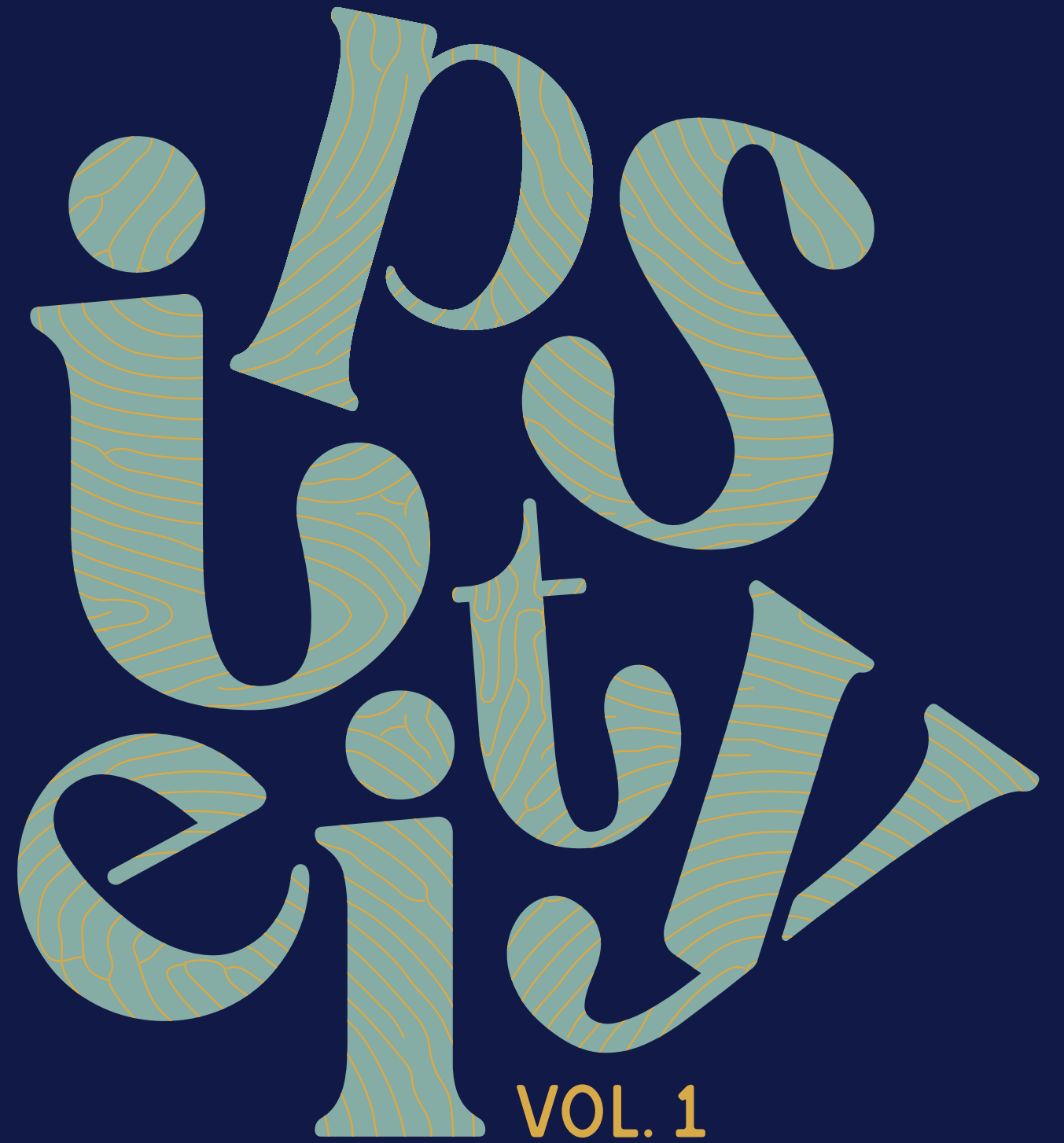
kate stallings

acknowledgments



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ipseity

ip·se·ity | \ ipsēətē \

:individual identity:SELFHOOD¹

When brainstorming ideas for the content of this book, I knew I wanted the subject matter to address something meaningful and personal to me, yet relatable to the book's audience—my peers. That being said, one of the most pressing issues that college students face is finding & defining our identity. The college and early twenties stage of life is widely known as one of the most formative times in a young adult's life. I've embarked on a journey of defining who I am the past few years since I've been in college, and I've had conversations with my friends about figuring out who we are many times. So, identity seemed the best thing to discuss as I wrapped up my college experience at Ole Miss.

This project dives into a young adults' relationship with the concept of identity and the things that might influence who we are, such as: faith, career, place, others' perceptions of us, our families, goals, and experiences. It is the exploration of defining selfhood in the beginnings of adulthood. This experience is expressed through the eyes of many of my peers, who were gracious enough to contribute their writings and personal reflections on their own experiences with defining their identity.

I hope that the attention-grabbing, curious title of the book, *Ipsenity*, fits its design and content and that it causes you to reflect on how one forms their ipseity—their selfhood; their individual identity. I hope that the rawness and the vulnerability of the materials that the contributing writers, who have so graciously shared their personal experiences with us through their writings, inspire you to ponder your own journey of finding your ipseity and what has made you who you are today.

— lauren taylor

Identity is what makes a person who they are; what makes them unique; what makes them themselves. It is arguably the most important and influential component of a person's life. What we do, how we treat others, and how we live our lives in general are all dependent upon how we define ourselves. As seen in the responses from my peers on the previous page, when we are doing things in alignment with our identity is when we feel most like ourselves. On the contrary, when we are doing things that do not align with our identity is when we feel most disconnected from ourselves.

The American Psychological Association defines identity as the following:

an individual's sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles. Identity involves a sense of continuity, or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year (despite physical or other changes). Such a sense is derived from one's body sensations; one's body image; and the feeling that one's memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self.²

Adolescence and early adulthood are the most formative years in an individual's journey to characterize their identity. Erik H. Erikson, a world-renowned developmental psychologist who coined the term "identity crisis," calls one's journey to define their identity as "the principal crisis of adolescence."³ In college, individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood and are mostly independent for the first time in their lives. They are no longer under their parents' constant supervision, have the freedom to make their own decisions, and live their own life with less parental restriction or judgment. They no longer have to conform to an identity that has often been created for them in their family environment but have the freedom to figure out and define their own selfhood.

While late adolescence and early adulthood is the defining period of time for the formation of an individual's identity, once their identity has developed, it remains fairly consistent for the remainder of the person's life. Developmental psychologists Laura Ferrer-Wreder and Jane Kroger verify that "certainly, identity-defining choices and life directions can change over time, but beyond emerging adulthood, major identity changes become far less common."⁴ However, small adjustments and adaptations of one's identity to certain life phases or contexts can surely occur. The main sense of identity is maintained, yet it is common (and healthy, for that matter) for small shifts in certain aspects of one's identity to occur based on environmental, personal, or physical changes. In his book *The Ethics of Identity*, Kwame Anthony Appiah states that "The sense of self (comprising the sense of being and the sense of 'I') is not, therefore, some edifice that is constructed and remains constant. Instead, it is a continually shifting phenomenon that acts like a vehicle in and through which we negotiate the world."⁵

So, how is this sense of self or personal identity defined in emerging adulthood? What constitutes the establishment of one's identity? Developmental psychologists point out various different factors associated with one's environment and life experience that can influence their identity formation. Although environment and context are important to the development of personal identity, the more pertinent influence is not only how the individual relates to their environment, but also how they relate their environment to themselves. According to Ferrer-Wreder and Kroger, "[Erikson] saw identity development also as a reciprocal relationship between individual and context, a process of recognizing and being recognized by others... its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going' and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count."⁴ The recognition of others is also essential to one's formation of identity. Whether these recognitions are positive or negative, they are taken to heart and influence identity formation, especially when given by those who are parental or significant figures in a person's life. As endorsed by many highly regarded developmental psychologists, identity is greatly influenced by environment and recognition.

Yet, there are many subcategories of environmental and interpersonal factors that must be addressed when discussing the journey of defining selfhood in the college years. These are factors such as family, place, faith, race, occupation, experiences, and hobbies. Now that we have defined what identity development means psychologically, I invite you to see how my peers have been affected by these different factors on their own identity journeys as they have gone through emerging adulthood. They offer vulnerable insight into their personal struggles as well as triumphs, and I hope their openness encourages you to be authentic with yourself as you ponder how these factors may influence your identity as well.

— lauren taylor

identity

A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

iden·ti·ty | \ ɪ-ˈden-tə-tē, ə-, -ˈde-nə- \

1 : the distinguishing character or personality of an individual: INDIVIDUALITY

2 : who someone is : the name of a person

3 : the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person different from others¹

Identity's most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going' and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count.⁴

you have
to lose
yourself
before
you can
really
find
yourself.

– alexis velarde

my words are what i know are true
they can hurt but they can heal
my words are what i'm now listening to
they're teaching me i can be real

i don't have to listen to your twisted words
that have nothing to do with me but all with you
i don't have to listen to your hurtful words
because that's the last thing i wanna do

so here i am, re-writing my truth
the truth that i've now discovered
that i am lovely, wanted, and deserving of love
my worth, finally uncovered

– natalie thwaites

UNCOVERED



i can't stop thinking about 23
by then will all my time set me free
will i still love temporary things
when will i realize
that i myself am one of these

where are you gonna go
when the lights go out in tennessee
where are you gonna run
when the sky goes dark beneath your feet
what are you chasing
what will you find
inside the city built in your mind
where are you going to go
when the lights go out in tennessee

sometimes i wonder why i try so hard
to hide that i'm insecure at all
a few clean clothes
months without a car
and i was coming home
to something i've never known
and it's scaring me to my core

where are you gonna go
when the lights go out in tennessee
where are you gonna run
when the sky goes dark beneath your feet
what are you chasing
what will you find
inside the city built in your mind
where are you going to go
when the lights go out in tennessee

what if the lighthouse
was never really on the shore
what if you're 18 and lost
and you can't find yourself
in anything you do
and it puts you through hell
and you hope and you pray
that maybe someday
you could see somebody else
can please someone let me know

where are you gonna go
when the lights go out in tennessee
where are you gonna run
when the sky goes dark beneath your feet
what are you chasing
what will you find
inside the city built in your mind

where are you going to go
when the lights go out in tennessee

– *chase nutting*

tennessee

其中最大的是爱。 the greatest of these is love

哥林多前书 13:13 现在常存的有信、望、爱这三样,其中最大的是爱。

"我是谁?" 是我一生中不断反思的一个问题。每个人对自己是谁都有不同的定义。有人以工作、社会地位、学历、家庭背景或过去来定义自己。有时候我会迷失自我,不晓得活着的意义或目的。而在我找寻自我的过程中,每一次我都发现我迷失的原因在于内心深处对某些事物的渴望,比如和家人的团聚、有一位爱人的陪伴、与人的关系等。然而这些事物的源头则是爱。在我一生中,我领受了来自不同人的爱。这些爱则定义了我对周围人事物的看法。因此对我而言,爱成就了今天的我。在我每一段人生中,爱始终都扮演着最重要的角色。

1 Corinthians 13:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

"Who am I?" is a question that I have been thinking about repeatedly in my life. Everyone has a different definition of their identity. Some define them by work, social status, education, family background or past. Sometimes, I struggle with my identity and forget the meaning or goal of life. However, in my journey to find myself, I often found that the reason that I lost myself is because of the desire for something from bottom of my heart. For example, seeing my family, having someone who loves me, having relationships with people, etc. All of these desires originate from love. In my life, I received love from many different people. This love shapes my point of view of everything. Therefore, this love defines who I am today. In every single period of my life, it has been playing the most important role.

箴言 31:26 她开口就说出智慧的话;她的舌头上充满慈爱的训诲。

我出生于马来西亚马六甲的一个七口之家。虽然住在同一个屋檐下,但我和身为工作狂的爸爸相处的时间不多。我在家排行最小,我和年龄最接近的姐姐也相差五岁。这导致我在成长的岁月里,很多时候都是和妈妈或自己度过。儿时,我常常不遵从妈妈的指示,甚至和她唱反调但长大之后我逐渐明白她的良苦用心。在很多幼时小小的细节里,我体会到了她爱我胜过她自己的精神。在我人生的最初阶段中,我第一次明白了何为爱。

Proverbs 31:26 "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue."

I was born into a family of seven members in Melaka, Malaysia. Although living under the same roof, I barely spent any time with my workaholic dad. I am the youngest child in my home and the closest sibling age gap, between me and my sister, is five years. Hence, during my childhood, I spent most of the time with myself or with my mom. When I was a child, I often refused to listen to my mom and went against her. But I started to understand her good intentions after I grew up. In many details of my childhood, she showed me that she loves me more than herself. That was the first time I learned about love in the earliest stage of my life.

Love shapes my point of view of everything. Therefore, all of this love defines who I am today. In every single period of my life, love has been playing the most important role.

约翰一书 4:19 我们爱,因为神先爱我们。

16岁那年,我开始对人的存在感到好奇。我不明白人为何而生,也不明白死亡是什么。在那一年,我遇见了上帝,也明白了爱的真谛。上帝的爱超乎我的想象。我本以为没有任何爱可以比亲情更伟大,更具有牺牲精神,可是耶稣基督却愿意为罪人死在十字架上。罗马书5章7-8节说“为义人死,是少有的;为好人死,或有敢作的;唯有基督在我们还作罪人的时候为我们死,神对我们的爱就在此显明了。”从那时候起,我人生中多了一份信仰、方向与爱。

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

When I was 16 years old, I started to question the existence of human beings. I did not understand why people exist and what death is. The same year, I met God and learned the true meaning of love. Love from God is beyond my understanding of love. I thought there was no love bigger and more sacrificial than what my mom showed me. However, Jesus Christ was willing to die on the cross for the sinners. Romans 5:7-8 says "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." From that moment, belief, direction and love were added into my life.

诗篇 16:8 我常常把耶和华摆在我面前,因他在我右边,我必不会动摇。

没有人知道未来有什么在等待着我们,但我知道我会继续以我认识和领受的爱活下去,并且付出我所拥有的。愿荣耀都归主,阿门。

Psalm 16:8 "I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

No one knows what is waiting for us in the future, but I know that I will keep living my life with the love that I have learned and accepted, and also by giving others what I have. May all the glory be to the LORD, amen.

加拉太书 5:14 因为全部的律法,都在“爱人如己”这一句话里面成全了。

“爱人如己”是圣经里非常重要的教导之一。从基督的爱,我学到了如何去爱别人。当有人相信并归于基督里时,他们便成为了我的弟兄姐妹。也因着这份关系,我可以和他们彼此勉励、祷告与扶持。除此之外,因为耶稣基督也爱不信主的人,所以我也以他为榜样去爱身边不认识上帝的人。我不再只接受爱,也开始付出爱。

Galatians 5:14 "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"Love your neighbor as yourself" is an extremely important lesson from the scripture. From Christ's love, I learned to love others. When someone believe in Christ, they became my brothers and sisters. Because of this relationship, we can encourage, pray and support one another. Besides that, because of Jesus Christ's love towards non-believers, I am supposed to love them as well. I am no longer only accept love, but I also love others.

— ming zern ngoh

sunlight waned over the horizon
as the gifted girl walked home
she had the ability to give life
through the slightest touch of her hand

in a checkered sea of white and brown
she waded through rows of cotton
seeking the over-ripe, dehydrated puffs
before resuming toward home

as she slid through dark highways
which snaked around the field
she spread her fingers out and over
brushing the sad white clouds within

she felt wanted, needed, desired
by the vulnerable, dying field
she made sure to touch each plant
so that they could keep blooming

even if it meant tears in her shirt
or shredding skin on thorny edges,
she still gave them her touch
so they would live on

the red cotton field

even if it meant going home late
or getting lost in the darkness,
even if it meant forgetting her dreams
and failing to reach her goals,

even if it meant missing the sunset
or standing in the pouring rain,
even if it meant losing everyone
and sacrificing everything,

she still gave
so they would live.

when she was done for the day
she stumbled toward her home
but didn't quite make it there
before collapsing in the road

she'd given so much of herself
to her beloved sea of cotton
and it would grow up without her
forever stained like the reddest rose.

— *kayci kimmons*



& dollars & cents

i have to know my worth
my worth in dollars and cents
and everything in between
you paid in coupons
and i let you
but i don't hate you
in fact i don't hate you at all
i love you
i loved you so much
it became me it overcame me
you gave me your heart
i gave you mine
i call that a privilege
i'm slowly looking for the beauty
the beauty in the ugly break
the ugliest heartbreak i've faced
it feels like my identity has been stolen
you, you thief
i'm slowly looking for my new identity
it will come back
i have to know my worth

– ella jervik

humanity

It's important to reflect on our memories, recognizing how they have shaped our character, values, and dreams.

It's vital to accept our physical appearance as a gift from God and become comfortable in our own skin.

It is essential for our sanity to have hobbies that are life-giving and integrated in our personalities.

It is necessary to accept the families we come from and the greater families we get to be apart of—growing in our roles as beloved daughters, sisters, mothers, and friends.

I write all this to first acknowledge that little, personal details are sacred to who we were made to be, who we are, and who we are becoming.

Yet the largest majority of our identity is not what sets us apart, but what sets us together. An overwhelming piece of our identity is simply our shared humanity.

Every day we seek identity in the edges of our existence—whether that be our workplace, quirky traits, hometowns, or one-time celebrity encounters. Mankind has become so desperate in need for individuality that identity is being rooted in new sexualities or specialized genders.

Our identity doesn't lie on the outskirts. It lies at the heart, the very center. We are brothers and sisters. We each start and end our lives in states of total poverty, in total abandonment to the care of another. We are each children of the same God. We each know what it is to hurt, to laugh, to mourn, to celebrate. We each crave solitude but flee from a quiet moment the second it sets. We each seek love and acceptance, often found in a familiar home and good meal.

May we not be disappointed in this sameness, but may there be a freedom in being so seamlessly integrated in the fabric of the world.

— meagan harkins

What does living out my identity mean? This sometimes can feel like a daily battle. I know my identity is found not in my successes, my appearance, my hobbies, the approval of others, but in the Creator of the universe. I know this to be true, yet I struggle daily to fully trust in Him and this identity. Some days the struggle between choosing an identity that pleases others, that robs me of peace and joy, or my true identity in Christ is overwhelming and tiring. My devotional New Morning Mercies reminded me of the importance of remembering the present gospel:

“So many of us have a huge dark hole in the middle of our gospel. Sure, we have a pretty good understanding of the gospel past, the forgiveness that we have received through the sacrifice of Jesus, and a fairly clear understanding of salvation future, the eternity that we will spend with Jesus, but have we really understood well the benefits of the work of Christ in the here and now?”⁶

To live out my identity is to live in accordance with the present Gospel. To do this, I must give myself—and others—grace every day, as the grace of God is abounding. Although I will struggle, since this world is broken, I am reminded of His grace and the beauty of a present gospel. In remembering that his mercies are new every morning and that the gospel is active now, I can rest in my identity as His child. I am His child in the waiting. I am His child in the hurt. I am His child in the loneliness. I am His child in the mistakes. I am His, despite all of these things. In all of the mess, He holds me.

— sarah behm

present living

they fear it
they look at me and project:
my arms folded at the dinner table,
they see
me in a strait jacket

they look at my bare feet and see
me running around hong kong
they look at my arms and see
the marks of a knife
the dent on my forehead must be
from the bathroom counter.

but mom, dad,
i'm just
anxious

these creative flurries
aren't coming from a brain that's
trying to exhaust all
genius ideas; hallucinations.

the flurries birth from my poor
attempt to write out the anxiety
and make something of myself.

truly,
i am very much aware
of what is going on around me
(and inside me?)

which make it
all the more difficult
to focus

– *elly shane*

I exist
so loudly
sometimes,
so loud,
they don't
have any
other choice
but to cover
their ears.

– *alexis velarde*

TRI POLAR



the road home

There are only 37.2 miles between my first and second home, which is also known as my college dorm. This is usually a 45–50 minute ride. Somehow, that stretch of road feels impossibly long to me most of the time. But going back and forth between my childhood home and college is a necessary journey, because it symbolizes an important transition in my life. It's also necessary because I'd rather do free laundry at home instead of spending \$1.50 to do it at my dorm.

I don't just go home to wash and dry. My mom probably thinks I come home to ask for money or for a home cooked meal, but that's not it either. Well, not entirely. Sometimes my second home feels like an escape. Everyone knows that college is freedom for most teenagers. I've had a lot of freedom to grow here. This is the place where I've grown personally and professionally through new experiences and relationships with other innovative and dynamic people. I've discovered a more extroverted side of myself by becoming an Orientation Leader and Ambassador, learned the importance of serving my community through professional organizations and student government, and embraced my existing passions by writing for the yearbook and creating a photography business. I would not be myself today if it weren't for the past 3 ½ years I've spent at the University of Mississippi.

But the journey hasn't been easy. I've experienced some of my highest highs and also my lowest lows on this campus. Stress and anxiety are my permanent roommates at school. I hate to say it, but sometimes my second home doesn't feel like a home

at all. So when I drive the 37.2 miles back to my first home, I'm usually going because I need to go back to the place where so much of me is ingrained. My first home is where I've experienced the most growth, where the foundations of my personality were born. I love writing so much because I get so much inspiration from the grassy landscape, vivid sunsets, and starry nights. I'm naturally adventurous and always trying new things because growing up in a rural atmosphere sometimes means inventing your own fun. I tend to be reserved and quiet because I grew up in a private, secluded, and peaceful space. No matter how far I go from home, I'll always feel the need to return and find comfort there.

The trip back home feels like I'm reaching out in search of my original self, which is the core of what makes me who I am. Yet, any time I leave my home, I'm reaching out to unlock new pieces of myself and discover my own potential. So the transition is doubly important, and it contributes to the person I want to be by allowing me to go back and forth between my first home and any other place where I might end up one day. I will always embrace that which has the potential to make me better, and if this transition is the key, then I'll always make it.

After I finish this last semester, I'll move on from college and find a new home, maybe a third, then a fourth and so on. The distance between my first home and those new places is currently unknown. I might not be so lucky to have a 37.2 mile trip this time, but then again, maybe I will. As my mom likes to say, the only constant in life is change, and the future is never certain. I'm just glad I'm along for the ride.

– *kayci kimmons*

conversation with another me

guy in the mirror
you are a familiar stranger
here's an invitation for you
may i know you?
you may be broken
but i promise
with grace and mercy
we will glue you piece by piece
on that day
birds will sing
with accompaniment of ocean and wind
the anthem of life

– *ming zern ngoh*



the journey



they tell me i'm beautiful, smart, and funny
they tell me i'm talented,
that i'll be successful and have money
they tell me i'm the way they wish to be one day
but what they don't realize is what it took along the way

they didn't see the hardships, tears, and failures
they didn't see what this heart saw throughout the years
they only see my strength, which i will not deny
but they didn't see the times i was only getting by

what a world we'd live in if we recognized others for their journey
for their perseverance, failures, trials, and learning
what a world we'd live in if we appreciated others along the way
instead of only praising them for who they are,
once they've seen their brighter day

— *natalie thwaites*

months of muffin

When I first started college, all I wanted to do was find a best friend. I felt like I had a lack of good friends in high school, and I was just ready to start a new chapter and meet new people. In my yearning for new friends, I realized that I sought approval from others way too much, I let my peers walk all over me, and I didn't truly know my self-value. In fact, I let my value be based on whether or not I was approved by others.

After a rough fall out with a friend, God started teaching me my self-value; it's crazy because I had no idea it was something I needed to learn. It's not like one day I woke up and said, "Okay, let me learn my self-value!" No. I thought I knew it, but man, when I look back at some of the decisions I made back then, I really didn't know. I don't like to say I have regrets, but if I could go back and do a few [or a lot of] things differently, I totally would.

I think identity took on a new meaning because I always felt like I knew who I was... and well, I did. I knew who I served, I knew what not to do, and I was not someone who was easily swayed.

I always stayed true to myself...yet I got skewed by my friends' opinions of me. Ironically, this tendency to seek approval and people-please had been there way before college—I just didn't know it. I had to go through those situations to find that out, and I'm so glad I did. I thought a friend was what I needed to feel valued and complete, when really, all I needed was to understand who I was in Christ.

During that period of time, I watched a preaching about how we shouldn't let others put labels on us, but only pay attention to what God says about us. It really spoke to me—so much so that it has stuck with me 7 years later. As a result, I grabbed my purple marker to write down scriptures and positive affirmations, I stuck them to my dorm room wall, and I began to declare them over myself. I wanted to believe the word of God more than anything.

This transformation took place when I was 20 years old; I was a junior in college. Lemme tell you, that year was *rough*. I still get a little bit emotional when I reflect on those days because I was feeling so helpless, and so, so sad. I would tell God, "Sheesh, I didn't sign up for all this drama! I just wanted to find a good friend and be happy!" Like I said before, if I could go back and do things differently, not gonna lie, I totally would. But the cool thing is that I never have to go back to that place again. God brought to light [through an unfavorable situation] the things I needed to change. These changes would not only grow me closer to Him, but allow me to see myself for who I truly was.

I don't like to say I have regrets, but if I could go back and do a few [or a lot of] things differently, I totally would.

It wasn't a piece of muffin, either. It took months for me heal. Months of spending time with God, months of declaring those scriptures over my life, and months for my mindset to change. Nonetheless, at some point it all clicked, and I was never the same.

— *moriah uriel*

**I was worthy
long before
you told me
I was worthy.
I am forever
being molded
by an Artist.
I am rare.**

— *alexis velarde*

mirror, mirror on the wall

CHANGING OUR RESPONSE TO
OUR PROXIMITY TO BEAUTY

Recently, I had an encounter with a friend that really made me think and rethink the topic of physical beauty. A few Sundays ago, my friend and I were walking out of church right after the service when she looked at me and said “you are just so pretty, it makes me feel like crap.” I was completely taken aback at that moment, like all of the words that I could have said in response fell right out of my mouth and to the floor. I felt horrible, confused, worried, and almost defensive. By the time I was able to think of something to say; an apology, a question, an opinion, the moment had passed and she had moved on to talking about our brunch reservation.

To say the least, this moment really struck me. I began questioning myself, my response, and how my identity played a part in my friend’s comment. I began to question both of our identities and how her view of me shaped both of our perceptions of each other. The clear issue of proximity to perceived beauty came rushing to my mind as I fell down this rabbit hole of thoughts. This got me thinking: what if closer proximity to perceived beauty made you feel more beautiful than less?

How many times have you felt less beautiful because of something or someone beautiful around you? How easy is it to become instantly defensive when we feel less beautiful? Why do we do it in the first place?

**This got me
thinking: what if
closer proximity to
perceived beauty
made you feel more
beautiful than less?**

From the time that we’re kids, we’re trained to compare and compete with each other in a lot of ways, specifically on the level of physical appearance. Why? I’m not sure. After this moment with my friend, I realized that just like she did so easily, I often find myself comparing and competing with

others based on physical appearance as well. Not only this, but I often find myself basing my identity on the way I look compared to those around me. Every morning and night on Instagram, everyday as I walk to campus, even when I sit on my couch and hang out with my roommates. It’s so beyond easy to find myself in a cycle of toxic competition with others that sometimes, I don’t even recognize that I’m doing it. It’s not until I’ve made a negative comment towards myself that I realize exactly what I am doing.

So I ask you, what would happen if next time we each find ourselves in this mental space, instead of falling into a toxic cycle of comparison when faced with perceived beauty, we find something about ourselves that we also find beautiful as well? For example, if you see someone walking down the street with your dream hair, instead of feeling less than and putting yourself down with words, actions, thoughts, or opinions, you find something about yourself that you find equally as beautiful. Maybe it’s your eyes, your laugh, or even the way that you look when you wake up in the morning. And beyond this, reflect and build on the ways this connects to your personal identities. Take one negative thought and turn it into two positive ones. Rebuild and come back more positive!

I know that like a lot of things, rewiring your response to perceived beauty won’t happen overnight. But my hope for you, for me, and for anyone who finds this article is that with time, we will build one another up versus tear each other down.

– *bella johnson*

someday

what a shame it is
the weight we let words hold
from the mouths of others
like they're the truth to be told

what a shame it is
that we believe what they say
without knowing the effect
they'll have on us some day

how beautiful it would be
if we listened to the truth
the facts in our heads
that we already knew

how beautiful would it be
if we lifted that weight
and started to live in our truth
so we can be ourselves some day

— *natalie thwaites*



momma,
i'm sorry
that i do not believe
i know what you want most
is for me
to bear the rosaries
around my neck
but i have to take it off-
i can't breathe

momma,
i'm sorry.
i fear i've failed you
you did everything right,
down to the
rug burned knees

when you get there, momma,
don't blame yourself
if your little girl
isn't beside you

because i'm trying my best momma
and i feel there is already
a divide between us

if only you could set down his cross
then you could embrace me
the way i am

momma i'm scared
that you will never be
fully proud of me
because there is a place in your heart
that i know, now,
i can never reach

– *elly shane*

A BUSHEL & A PECK

When you
decide to
search for
me, do not be
surprised
when you come
across a sign
that reads: lost
in the universe,
be back when I
find her.

– *alexis velarde*



the lie i've lived

i thought i knew everything
from quarks to the galaxies
with a few clicks, i could swim across the ocean
touching the land that i have never been
the truth is, i was wandering around my pond
dreaming my virtual friends truly know who i am
struggle to wake myself up
the candy-like lie sings the lullaby
it feels good to dive in
the fake life that i have been living in
but
do i know who i truly am?
only realize i am outside the circles
forget the feeling of being touched and loved
pinch myself and feel the jolt
i am happy to breathe in this world once again

– *ming zern ngoh*

“Christian selfhood is not defined in terms of who we are in and of ourselves. It’s defined in terms of what God does to us and the relationship he creates with us and the destiny he appoints for us. God made us who we are so we could make known who he is. Our identity is for the sake of making known his identity.”

— John Piper

**in
his
image.**

When it comes to my faith, it’s the thing that holds me together. It makes me who I am. It guides my choices, my words, my actions, my goals and dreams, and my experiences. It affects every single aspect of my life. One of the things that makes me feel most like myself is worshiping God and talking about Jesus with other people. Anyone that knows me knows I love deep conversations, and there’s nothing deeper than talking about my Creator and His testimony in my life. My identity is most grounded when I am reminded who I am in Jesus, and who I am because of Jesus. So who is that? Where do I get this information about my identity? Through the Word of God spoken through the Bible.

**God created man
in His own image,
in the image of God
He created him;
male and female He
created them.**

Genesis 1:27

First, I have learned from Scripture that I was created by God, called beautiful and wonderful in His eyes. Genesis 1:27 says that “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Not only did the Creator of the Universe create me, but he created me in his image, meaning I was meant to be like him. Because of this, I have intrinsic value. The Lord teaches me that I have value, no matter my achievements or failures, something completely contrary to the achievement-driven American society we live in. Psalm 139:13–14 says, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” Not only did God create me and every other human being personally and individually, but we are beautifully and wonderfully

made, especially because of how Jesus has redeemed those who believe in Him from their brokenness. When I consider this, I am reminded that I do not need to worry about what others think, because the most important One has already spoken His love and approval over me. ***My identity is secure in Christ because I know He created me and He calls me good.***

Not only am I created by God, but He calls me his child. Galatians 3:26 says, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” Through the sacrifice that Jesus made for me when he died on the cross and was resurrected, I can be called a child of God because of my redemption in Christ. Romans 8:15 says, “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” Those who have accepted Jesus Christ’s gift of salvation can run to their Heavenly Father, affectionately calling Him Father, and be accepted with open and loving arms. And this gift of salvation is available to anyone who will accept it! Anyone who does this can be called a child of God. Yet, being a child of God is so much more than just a title: it means that believers can receive the perfect love, provision, and protection that the Heavenly Father can offer. And not only can they receive these things, but they can also live out a life of radical love because of the overflow of love that they receive from God through Jesus. ***My identity is secure in Christ because I have been adopted as His child.***

**‘And I will be a father
to you, And you shall
be sons and daughters
to Me,’ says the Lord
Almighty.**

2 Corinthians 6:18

Because of my salvation in Jesus, I am not defined by my mistakes: I am forgiven. No matter how bad I mess up, I am not defined by my mistakes because of the forgiveness I have received through Jesus. The Bible says that once we accept Jesus’ free gift of salvation, we are no longer defined by our sins and the mistakes we have made. Instead, we are forgiven and freed from the weight of our sins that used to define us. Our reputations are redeemed because we put our faith in Jesus: “In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us.” (Ephesians 1:7-8) The weight of our actions has been lifted by Jesus: our identity is no longer in our actions and our failures, but in the forgiveness and freedom we have received through Christ. ***My identity is secure in Christ because through Him, I am not defined by my mistakes, but by His triumph over sin.***

**For He [God] has
rescued us from the
dominion of darkness
and brought us into
the kingdom of the
Son he loves, in whom
we have redemption,
the forgiveness of sins.**

Colossians 1:13-14

Because of the forgiveness Jesus has given me, I can experience true freedom. Romans 6:6 says, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” As a believer, I no longer have to be controlled by the darkness of sin in my life, but I can live confidently in my identity as a free child of God because of the redemption I have received through Jesus. The Bible calls those who believe a “new creation” in

2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” I am a new person because of my freedom and redemption in Christ. I am defined by this redemption and I am called to live in freedom: freedom from the sinful, dark parts of myself; freedom from the way that others define me; freedom from any identity that the world or society tries to impose upon me; freedom even from the way I define myself. Ultimately, as a Christian, the only identity that will matter is my new identity in Christ as a redeemed, loved, chosen child of God. ***My identity is secure in Christ because he has given me freedom and a new identity in Him.***

**You will know the truth,
and the truth will set
you free... So if the Son
sets you free, you will
be free indeed.**

John 8:33, 36

How does this newfound freedom affect how I live my life? Well, because of the love, forgiveness, and freedom I've received from Christ, I am called to live differently. My identity as a new creation in Christ is evidenced by the new way that I live my life, in honor of all that Jesus has done for me. As a Christian, Jesus has called me and all others who follow Jesus to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” in Matthew 28:19–20. Since Jesus has given me so much, I want to share with others how He can redeem their lives—How he can take their brokenness and messiness and turn it into something beautiful, and how he's done that very thing in my life and many others. That's why I personally love sharing my testimony with people. I just can't keep the evidence of God's grace and redemption in my life to myself, because I want

everyone else to experience the same permanent redemption, joy, and hope that I have experienced while walking in faith with God. Not only should Christians be excited to share the good news of Jesus and His work in our lives, but Jesus also calls us to live like we have been given the greatest gift—salvation—because we have! In Mark 12:29–31, Jesus says, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.... [And] you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” When we have been mercifully given salvation, along with eternal joy, love, and hope, the abundance of these things in our lives is supposed to overflow into everything we do and how we treat others. We are to be set apart by the way we act: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9) Christians, with their new identity, are called to be heaven-focused. Everything we do is to be for the glory of God. This requires a new, Christ-centered mentality and heart posture, especially because of our new identity in Jesus. Colossians 3:1–3 says, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” ***My identity is secure in Christ because his gift of salvation allows me to live and act differently.***

**For God so loved the
world, that he gave his
only Son, that whoever
believes in him should
not perish but have
eternal life.**

John 3:16

Indeed, Christ's gift of salvation allows me to live differently, but salvation in Christ also means that I have an eternal hope that cannot be taken away. Once a person acknowledges that Christ is their Savior, they are promised eternal life, the ability to call heaven home, and the privilege to experience life after death. Sinfulness promises death, but redemption in Jesus promises perpetual life and life to the fullest. Therefore, there is no fear in death for Christians, because although our earthly bodies may pass away, our souls will live on. Anyone can experience life right now, even those who have been dead in their sin. In fact, Jesus welcomes sinners: they are the specific people he came to earth to save! The best part about this is that anyone who believes can have hope—hope that will never fade and can never be taken away. Hope in Jesus is permanent and irrevocable because his salvation and love are everlasting. ***My identity is secure in Christ because I have eternal life and eternal hope in Him.***

**I have been crucified
with Christ. It is no
longer I who live, but
Christ who lives in me.
And the life I now live
in the flesh I live by
faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and
gave himself for me.**

Galatians 2:20

The beautiful thing about having an identity rooted in Christ is that all of the other ways we define our identity, or even all of the factors by which society defines our identity, are deconstructed and nullified. None of it matters anymore—our occupation, actions, experiences, goals, family, hobbies, the words we speak or words spoken to us, or our location. Ultimately, our true identity in Christ is

to glorify Him and make Him known. To love Him and to be loved by Him. To joyfully and humbly receive his unending, undeserved mercy through the precious gift that is Jesus Christ. So, to those of you who believe, are you defining your identity in Christ or in something else? Are you looking to God to define who you are above all else? To those of you who don't believe, are you willing to receive the free gift of salvation that God has so graciously given through Jesus by accepting Him as Lord of your life? Are you weary of searching for your identity in things on earth, feeling empty and confused by the struggle to find yourself? ***Come find peace and rest for your weary soul in the arms of the Father, and be born again to find your true identity in Christ—an identity that can never be questioned, taken away, or changed.***

— lauren taylor

**Come to me, all you
who are weary and
burdened, and I will
give you rest. Take
my yoke upon you
and learn from me,
for I am gentle and
humble in heart, and
you will find rest for
your souls. For my
yoke is easy and my
burden is light.**

Matthew 11:28–30

about the creator



lauren taylor is a student at the University of Mississippi pursuing her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in Graphic Design. She is from Denver, Colorado, but has roots in St. Louis, Missouri and Chicago, Illinois, and now calls Naples, Florida home. She is on the executive board for GRID, Ole Miss' Graphic Design club, the leadership team for the Ole Miss chapter of Delight Ministries, a Christian community for college women, and is a designer for *The Ole Miss* yearbook. Deep conversations, the beach, listening to music, spending time with friends and family, DIY projects, cheering on the Rebels football team, and reading are some of her favorite things. She strives to bring glory to God through being kind, working hard, and using her talents to bring joy & light to the people around her.

meet the contributors



moriah uriel is from New Jersey. She attended Georgian Court University and New York University. She loves dancing, writing, and baking, and she is currently involved in the dance ministry at her local church. Her goal is to use her gifts and passions for the Kingdom of God.

meagan harkins was born and raised in Oviedo, Florida. She has two parents & two brothers & golden retrievers whom she loves dearly. She is Roman Catholic and a recent graduate of Ole Miss, where she studied journalism and religion. She now lives in Nashville, Tennessee working for Barefoot Republic Camp & Retreat Center, a ministry that focuses on racial, cultural, and socioeconomic divides in the church.



natalie thwaites is a Psychology undergraduate student at Lipscomb University. She is an aspiring pediatric clinical neuropsychologist and has a passion for helping others, especially children who struggle daily due to the challenges caused by their mental illnesses and additional limitations. She has a love for writing poems, books, and songs and expressing herself through music as well. Her main goal in life is to radiate Christ's love and compassion toward others while utilizing her talents.



meet the contributors



sarah behm is a senior at Belmont University from Denver, Colorado. She is a Social Entrepreneurship major and Dance minor, and plans to graduate in the spring of 2022. Her favorite things are hiking, dancing, traveling, listening to music, reading, and spending time with her loved ones.

kayci kimmons is a senior chemistry major from Batesville, MS. She plans to go to medical school in the future and one of her favorite hobbies is writing and blogging!



ella jervik was born in Hawaii and raised in Colorado. She fell in love with music early on when a mentor pushed her to start writing poems and songs. Ever since then, writing has been her therapy.

elly shane is an R&B singer-songwriter from Denver, Colorado. She is studying music industry at the University of Southern California while working on her debut EP.



chase nutting is a songwriter and producer from Denver, Colorado. Currently going to school at Belmont University in Nashville, he is pursuing a career in the music industry. He pairs an intimate writing style with his larger than life production that appeals to fans of any genre.



ming zern ngoh is from Melaka, Malaysia. He is a graduate student at the University of Mississippi, earning his M.S. in mathematics. His hobbies are reading, playing basketball, working out, hiding in nature, traveling, watching movies, and cooking. His favorite Bible verse is Psalm 16:8.

alexis velarde is a Communications major at Colorado Christian University. She is on her way to becoming a film actor and screenwriter. She expresses herself through all kinds of creative outlets such as writing novels, drawing, and acting. Her ultimate dream is to break into the acting world and become a voice for God in Hollywood and to invoke deep emotions in her audience.



bella johnson Bella Johnson is a fourth-year student at Colorado State University studying English Creative Writing with a minor in Ethnic Studies. She is graduating in May of 2022! She writes because she hopes to connect, strives to impact, and works to strike up conversations with likely & unlikely humans on things that matter most to us.

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references

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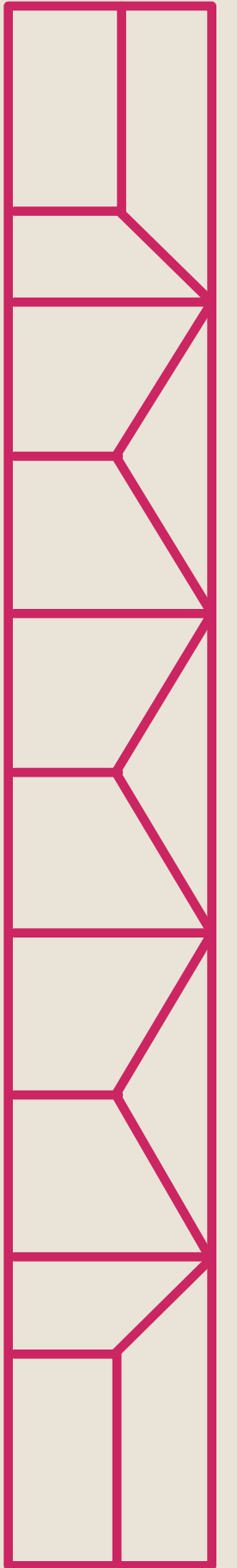
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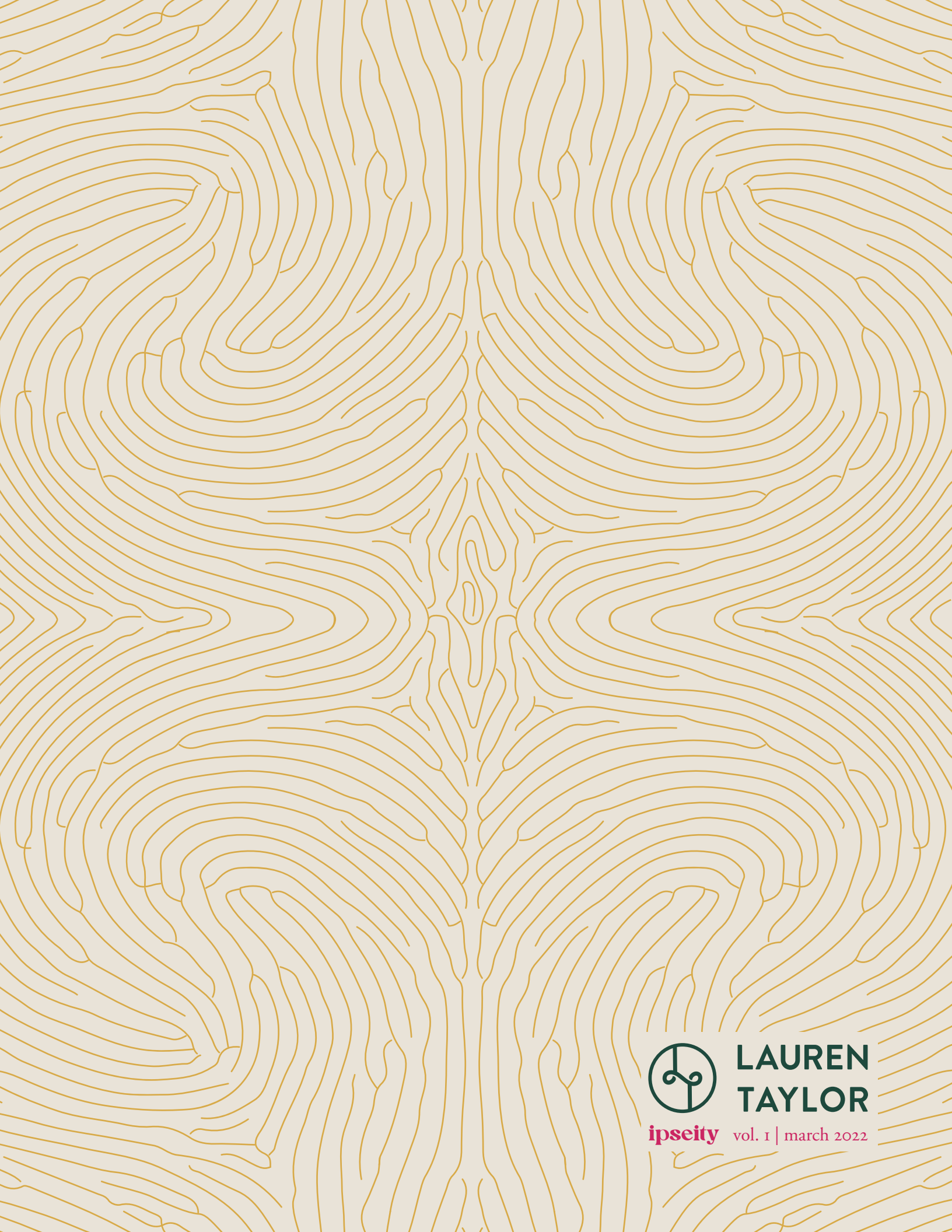
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